

## **Spatial development - theories and practice**

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Spatial development policies are intended to ensure the balanced and sustainable development of the Union territory in accordance with the basic objectives of Community policy. Although it does not justify further Community responsibilities as regards spatial planning, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a framework for policy guidance to improve cooperation among Community sectoral policies which have a significant impact in spatial terms.

ESPON is set up to support policy development and to build a European scientific community in the field of territorial development. The main aim is to increase the general body of knowledge about territorial structures, trends and policy impacts, therefore it is committed to develop practicable definitions of spatial terms, consistent spatial indicators, methodologies for typologies of areas, alternative long term scenarios for the spatial development of the European territory and its spatial components and to assess the use(fullness) of quantitative targets for European spatial development policy, and to produce maps.

## **Területi fejlettség – elmélet és gyakorlatok**

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A területfejlesztési politika célja, hogy az Európai Unió területén kiegyensúlyozott és fenntartható fejlődést biztosítson a Közösségi politika alapvető céljaival összhangban. Habár a közösség számára nem ír elő felelősségi köröket a területi tervezésre tekintettel, az Európai Területfejlesztési Perspektíva egy olyan politikai keretirányzat, amely javíthatja a jelentős területfejlesztési hatással bíró Közösségi szektorális politikák közötti együttműködést.

Az Európai Tervezési Megfigyelő Hálózat (ESPON) azzal a céllal alakult, hogy támogassa a politikai fejlődést, és épüljön ki egy európai tudományos közösség a területfejlesztés szolgálatában. Fő célkitűzése, hogy a területi struktúrák, trendek és a területpolitika hatásai vonatkozásában növelje a rendelkezésre álló tudásbázist. Az ESPON feladatai közé tartozik, hogy a területi terminusokra gyakorlati definíciókat, következetes mutatószámokat és a területi tipizáláshoz módszertant, valamint alternatív hosszú távú scénáriókat dolgozzon ki az európai területfejlesztés és összetevői számára és hogy megbecsülje a mennyiségi célkitűzések hasznosulását az európai területfejlesztési politikában és térképeket készítsen.

## Introduction

Spatial development policies are intended to ensure the sustainable balanced development of the European territory which respects its diversity. Although it does not justify further Community responsibilities as regards spatial planning, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a framework for policy guidance to improve cooperation among Community sectoral policies which have a significant impact in spatial terms. It was drawn up because it was found that the work of the Member States complemented each other best if directed towards common objectives for spatial development.

The aim of the study is to review the primary mainstreams of spatial development policies from the aspect how and with what instrument these are intended to serve the main objectives of the EU's regional and territorial development.

## Spatial development policy and objectives

Spatial development policies are intended to ensure the sustainable balanced development of the European territory which respects its diversity. Policy objectives and general principles of spatial development are defined at Union level in a way that they are in accordance with the basic objectives of Community policy: economic and social cohesion, knowledge-based economic competitiveness complying with the principles of sustainable development and the conservation of diverse natural and cultural resources. Although it does not justify further Community responsibilities as regards spatial planning, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a framework for policy guidance to improve cooperation among Community sectoral policies which have a significant impact in spatial terms (1). It was drawn up because it was found that the work of the Member States complemented each other best if directed towards common objectives for spatial development.

The first proposals on spatial development date from the sixties with the European Parliament's European Regional Planning Scheme. The Commission's documents "Europe 2000" (COM(90) 544) (2) and "Europe 2000+" (COM(94) 354) (3) gave a decisive boost to the preparation of a concerted policy. The Liège Council in 1993 was the starting point for preparation of the European Spatial Development Perspective as it is now. Since then, successive presidencies, assisted by the Spatial Development Committee comprising representatives of the Commission and national officials, drew up a number of drafts resulting in the final adoption of the ESDP in May 1999 at the Potsdam informal Council of ministers responsible for spatial planning. The ESDP is in two parts: I) the contribution of the spatial development policy as a new dimension of European policy and II) the trends, opportunities and challenges facing the territory of the EU.

The underlying idea in the ESDP was that economic growth and the convergence of certain economic indicators are not enough to achieve the goal of economic and social cohesion, so concerted action on spatial development is needed to correct the disparities detected. This includes: constant progress in economic integration (EMU, completion of the internal market), a growing role for local and regional authorities, the enlargement of the Union to Central and Eastern Europe and the development of links between the EU and their neighbours.

## *Interaction areas of ESDP*

The policy objectives and options of the ESDP are addressed to all those involved in spatial development at the European, national, regional and local levels. The European Spatial

Development Perspective has selected four major areas which interact and exert considerable pressure on the spatial development of the European Union (1):

- **The development of urban areas:**  
Almost 80% of the population of the Union now lives in towns. Urban centres are being restructured or emerging and networks of towns are forming and cooperating across frontiers. A new relationship between the town and the country is required to meet the challenges facing our territories.
- **The development of rural areas:**  
The rural areas of the European Union are often threatened by marginalisation, mainly because of the possible concatenation of constraints such as distance from the main towns, harsh climates, thinly-spread population and inadequate infrastructure or a lack of economic diversification because of the preponderance of agriculture. The environment offers both problems and assets, so demonstrating both the need to protect natural resources and ecosystems and the opportunities offered by various ways of exploiting economic potential (green and cultural tourism, agricultural diversification).
- **Transport:**  
As the single market is completed, the constant growth in road and air traffic generates bottlenecks and pressure on the environment. The European Union is one of the main emitters of carbon dioxide in the world and the uneven distribution of infrastructure across its territory may result in substantial imbalances in terms of economic investment and call into question the principles of territorial cohesion.
- **The natural and cultural heritage:**  
Its diverse natural and cultural heritage is a great richness for Europe but it is threatened by some aspects of economic and social modernisation. The fauna, flora, water, soil and traditional landscapes have to cope with the imbalances generated by an over-exploited environment. With an eye to sustainable development, Europe's spatial planning policy seeks to reduce such practices and encourage the rational use of resources.

### **Community policies with influence on the territory of the EU**

Despite there being a specific title on economic and social cohesion in the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Union's sectoral policies have no clearly defined spatial objectives, although several of them have a substantial influence on the Community territory as a geographical area receiving assistance (1).

Their territorial impact depends on the nature of the assistance, whether

- financial (common agricultural policy, regional policy through the Structural Funds, specific aid for research and innovation),
- legislative (policy on competition or the environment) or
- planning (policy on energy and transport).

### ***Sectoral policies with territorial impact and main features***

#### **The Structural Funds:**

The various cohesion reports show that disparities between Member States are diminishing but those between regions are growing.

The Structural Funds seek to promote economic and social cohesion. They provide assistance mainly in the eligible areas (Objective 1 for the regions whose development is lagging behind, Objective 2 for areas facing conversion) and, to a lesser extent, through a spatial typology providing a basis for the Community Initiatives (Interreg programmes for border areas, Urban II for urban areas, Leader+ for rural areas).

The programme-based system for the Structural Funds offers the possibility of designing integrated development plans which involve all those engaged at local level in a representative and transparent partnership.

### **The Common Agricultural Policy:**

The initial concern of the CAP was productivity but successive reforms have concentrated on the close links between agriculture and rural areas. Now, other objectives, food safety and respect for the environment, are more important.

Better coordination of the various rural development policies has become increasingly necessary because the enlargement of the Union and changes in world trade are throwing up major challenges for rural areas: the restructuring of the agricultural sector, particularly in the candidate and new member countries, economic diversification in some areas and the development of a new relationship between town and country.

### **Competition policy:**

Competition policy works to encourage the integration of national markets into a single European market, principally by preventing cartels between firms and abuse of dominant positions, monitoring mergers and acquisitions and providing a framework for State aids. These measures have an impact on the geographical distribution of economic activities. The Commission also acknowledges the need for intervention to ensure a balance between competition and general interest objectives and ensuring a basic, uniform universal service throughout the territory. While it regards regional State aids as incompatible with the common market, it nevertheless accepts them in duly justified cases: specific support for areas whose development is lagging behind and which are facing conversion or natural handicaps (climatic conditions, isolation).

### **The trans-European networks (TENs):**

The Community contributes to the establishment of the trans-European networks in the areas of transport, telecommunications and energy supply. Because these have direct repercussions on the use of space, they also help build up the internal market and strengthen economic and social cohesion by improving links between central areas and island, land-locked and peripheral areas.

Transport networks account for 80% of the Community TEN budget. The aim is to establish an efficient and sustainable but environmentally-friendly system: relieving the road network through high-speed rail lines and the promotion of waterways and expanding public transport and cycling in towns. Mainly through distance working and training, telecommunications networks help overcome geographical handicaps. In the energy sector (gas, electricity), the territorial impact concerns the effects on land use and changes in consumption patterns.

### **Environment policy:**

The Treaty of Amsterdam further stressed the importance of environmental issues by incorporating environmental requirements into the implementation of all Community policies. Environmental impact studies are required before major investment projects are carried out. The territorial impact of environmental policy also concerns the definition of protected areas ("Natura 2000" network) for fauna and flora, a reduction in the use of harmful substances

(nitrates) in agriculture, regulating waste treatment, limiting atmospheric and noise pollution and promoting renewable energy (wind energy).

### **Research and Technological Development (RTD):**

Community policy on RTD promotes cooperation between firms, research centres and universities. There are no regional criteria for the choice of projects. Thanks to targeted territorial marketing and the use of their specific resources, the least prosperous regions are able to attract RTD investment. The multiannual Framework Programme supports research into spatial development on topics such as "the city of tomorrow and the cultural heritage", "the sustainable management of agriculture and fisheries" and "sustainable management and quality of water").

### **European Spatial Planning Observation Network**

ESPON was set up in 2002 with a five-year programme of applied research which has since engaged a wide range of researchers from across Europe (4). The Programme has been funded and managed jointly by the European Commission and the Member States. Its governing principles and financial rules are set within the framework of the Community Initiative INTERREG III. Its principle objective is to increase the general body of knowledge about territorial structures, trends and policy impacts, therefore it is committed to develop practicable definitions of spatial terms, consistent spatial indicators, methodologies for typologies of areas, alternative long term scenarios for the spatial development of the European territory and its spatial components and to assess the use(fullness) of quantitative targets for European spatial development policy, and to produce maps.

It is widely recognised that there has been an increasing focus on the territorial dimension in policies of the Member States and within the European Union in the last decade particularly after publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in 1999. In general, the ESDP has provided a platform upon which the rationale for adopting a strategic territorial approach to policy has found a stronger voice both at the EU and the national and regional level. As such, over the recent years the territorial dimension has gained ground in the EU policy agenda and maintained the momentum for a better integration of various EU policy sectors around territorially-based strategies. The adopted but not ratified Treaty for the EU proposing the aim of territorial cohesion and the development of EU Cohesion policy, including European territorial cooperation as objective, are clear examples of this agenda.

The impetus for establishing a programme devoted to applied territorial research was further reinforced by enlargement of the European Union. The need for applied research on territorial dimensions of EU policy also followed from the Lisbon (2000) and Gothenburg (2001) Declarations.

Since Leipzig, the first basic principle that has been agreed upon is that the ESPON should consist of a network of national focal points, each of which co-ordinate a sub-network of research institutes in the Member State concerned, while a permanent Secretariat is entrusted with the co-ordination of the national focal points at a Community level (5). Appropriate links needed to be established between the basic Community network and focal points in the non member countries. Two other principles were laid out in the Noordwijk first official draft: "The European Observatory Network should concentrate on the technical and scientific aspects of the drawing-up and the periodic updating of the ESDP", and "it operates on the basis of clear mandates from the Spatial Development Committee (CSD)". The



technical and scientific assistance provided by the whole ESPON to the CSD embraces the support when revisions and refinements of successive versions of the ESDP document are necessary, but also a wide range of possible related tasks.

The main task of the ESPON is to constitute the scientific and technical backbone of the work of the CSD regarding the ESDP process in all its forms. The ESPON concentrates on technical assistance to the drawing-up and updating of the ESDP (excluding the political aspects, which belong to the core tasks of the CSD). A number of technical tasks which have to be fulfilled in order to develop the necessary knowledge base needed in the ESDP process were identified as:

- development of common (e.g. practicable) definitions of spatial terms;
- development of consistent spatial indicators;
- development of methodologies for typologies of areas;
- development of alternative long term scenarios for the spatial development of (parts of) the European territory and its spatial components;
- assessment of the use(fullness) of quantitative targets for European spatial development policy;
- the production of maps.

Various additional areas of activity are envisaged for the ESPON, including:

- spatial assessment of the Community policies;
- assessment of the value added by the spatial approach;
- common research projects on e.g. cross-border issues;
- research on spatial social, socio-economic and economic effects;
- evaluation of experiences in different spatial planning systems in the EU, (periodic updating of the Compendium of planning systems and policies, including the extension to non Member countries);
- terminology of spatial planning;
- methods of measurement of spatial phenomena;
- discussion about ecological and social standards.

## **Results of ESPON 2006 Programme**

The ESPON 2006 programme has faced, and tried to overcome, a number of contextual constraints at the level of both the EU and Member States, including the gaps in available, accessible, harmonised and consistent territorially-relevant indicators and data and the dominance of the economic imperatives in data collection at European level.

Based on a total of 34 applied research projects, the ESPON 2006 Programme has produced a substantial new body of knowledge on trends, perspectives, policy impacts, relationships and potentials within the regions and larger territories of the European territory, which have been communicated to and discussed among policy makers, practitioners, and scientists at all levels and across Europe.

ESPON thematic research priorities are driven by policy orientations regarding territorial cohesion, regional competitiveness and the achievement of a more 'balanced European territory'. Indeed, ESPON's emphasis on mapping the territorial diversity and differentiation has been to provide the knowledge base for the EU policy on territorial cohesion. Moreover, focus has been on the competitive position of the EU and its regions and cities in the global market, as promoted by the Lisbon Strategy, and the pursuit of sustainable development, as promoted by the Gothenburg Strategy.

The applied research projects under the ESPON 2006 Programme have been structured under 3 main priorities.

- Under Priority 1, Thematic Studies have examined trends on a variety of thematic issues related to regions and larger territories, including structural issues such as the urban system of Europe, the functionality of different urban regions and the growing interdependencies between urban and rural areas.
- Under Priority 2, the emphasis is on examining the Territorial Impact of major EU sectoral policies such as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Transport and TENs, Structural Funds, and Research and Development.
- Priority 3 has included a number of Cross-thematic and coordinating projects focusing on integrating and synthesising the results of other studies with an emphasis on producing: indicators for territorial analysis, integrated data bases and tools, typologies of the European regions, and territorial development scenarios.

### **Future involvement of ESPON**

European policy development has moved towards recognising the territorial dimension of policy decision and the added value from an integrated territorial approach when searching for development opportunities.

In the Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013, the Commission and EU Member States have included a territorial objective of cooperation and strengthened the strategic dimension of cohesion policy in order to ensure that Community priorities are better integrated into national and regional development programmes. European policy development related to Cohesion Policy will reach a number of milestones during 2007-2013 such as the discussion on the Community budget in 2008-2009, the revision of the Community Strategic Guidelines and the 5<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report. The ESPON 2013 Programme shall play a strategic role in supporting this policy process with evidence and information.

The key Community priorities are imbedded in (1) the renewed Lisbon Agenda aiming at mobilising all appropriate national and Community resources in the effort to contribute the maximum to raise growth and create jobs, and (2) a sustainable development strategy as agreed at the Gothenburg Summit. ESPON results so far show that all regions do not possess the same degree of potential for contributing to this agenda. Their diversity, particular in the economic base, implies that strategies different than opting for a knowledge-based economy might be more promising. Moreover, some regions seem to have under-used potential seen from a wider European perspective.

The strategic objectives of key importance for an efficient and modern regional policy contributing to the renewed Lisbon strategy and its overall aims can be condensed as follows:

- Competitiveness, building on the existing assets and under-utilised potentials in the region related to the existing economic base.
- Attractiveness, building new assets for the region that can ensure the inflow of investments and skills, particularly in support of a knowledge-based economy.
- Liveability, ensuring cohesion and a sustainable community with a high level of quality of life and environment for the citizens and for existing as well as future activities.

***Expectations of the ESPON 2013 Programme***

The European-wide evidence provided by the ESPON 2007-2013 Programme will potentially benefit policy makers all over Europe at all levels. Policy makers dealing with development of regions and larger territories need for the design of their policies to be supported by evidence and comparable information on the regions as well as on long term evolutions and perspectives, which draw the attention on changing framework conditions.

Cohesion policy and regional policy, with their objectives on cohesion, competitiveness and territorial cooperation, have to rely on solid and comparable regionalised information to meet the new challenges and become efficient. This holds true for all three objectives of Cohesion policy 2007-2013. The ESPON 2013 Programme shall play a strategic role in supporting this policy process with evidence and information. The intergovernmental process defining politically a Territorial Agenda for Europe based on an analysis of the territorial state and perspectives for the European Union is making substantial use of existing ESPON results. Further activities and monitoring of the European territory in relation to the political agenda is also expected to require information stemming from ESPON 2013 actions.

Further comparable information and evidence on all regions of the entire European territory shall support future evidence based regional policy. Better and comparable information can help regions meet the renewed paradigm for European development according to the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategy and to see potential for improving regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion. Knowledge support in relation to Objective 1, 2 and 3 is expected to create substantial added value. For programmes under Objective 1 and 2 the evidence provided by ESPON 2013 will support the inclusion of a European perspective in programme strategies and help better define, target and localise some themes and actions. For Objective 3 the ESPON 2013 results will supply programmes for cross-border cooperation, transnational and interregional cooperation with comparable information and evidence at the level of regions that can help define under-used potentials and comparative advantages for development of strategies, programmes and projects.

The priorities of the approved operational programme are as follows:

- Applied research on territorial development, competitiveness and cohesion: Evidence on European territorial trends, perspectives and policy impacts
- Targeted analysis based on user demand: European perspective to development of different types of territories
- Scientific platform and tools: Territorial indicators and data, analytical tools and scientific support
- Capitalisation, ownership and participation: Capacity building, dialogue and networking
- Technical Assistance, Analytical Support and Communication

***Territorial Agenda of the European Union***

As agreed on the informal ministerial meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion in Leipzig, 24-25 May 2007; the framework of an action-oriented political cooperation was laid down in order to achieve a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions.

This agreement specified four main areas such as:



- Strengthening territorial cohesion as future task
- Strengthening regional identities, making better use of territorial diversity, as new challenges
- Territorial priorities for the development of the European Union, such as
  - polycentric development and innovation through networking of city regions and cities
  - new forms of partnership and territorial governance between rural and urban areas
  - promoting regional clusters of competition and innovation in Europe
  - strengthening and extension of Trans-European Networks
  - promoting Trans-European risk-management including the impacts of climate change
  - strengthening of ecological structures and cultural resources as the added value for development
- An implementation scheme for the Territorial Agenda, where ESPON 2013 Programme is expected to undertake a more in-depth analysis of the effects of the EU policies on territorial cohesion, reveal cause-and-effect relationships and develop operational indicators for a regular reporting on territorial matters.

## Conclusions

Policy objectives and general principles of spatial development are defined at Union level in a way that they are in accordance with the basic objectives of Community policy: economic and social cohesion, knowledge-based economic competitiveness complying with the principles of sustainable development and the conservation of diverse natural and cultural resources. Although it does not justify further Community responsibilities as regards spatial planning, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a framework for policy guidance to improve cooperation among Community sectoral policies which have a significant impact in spatial terms.

The European territorial policy which, as an agreement achieved in the ministerial informal meeting on territorial cohesion and urban development, identifies the tasks and necessary steps of an action-oriented political framework was developed together with the European Commission. It supports the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies of the European Council as complementary strategies (6). The specified organisations and institutions, precisely assigned with their responsibilities and tasks can be regarded as the upmost achievement of the development of the European Territorial agenda in order to ensure the contribution of it to sustainable economic growth and job creation as well as social and ecological development in all EU regions. In achieving all these, ESPON 2013 Programme is expected to undertake a more in-depth analysis of the effects of the EU policies on territorial cohesion, reveal cause-and-effect relationships and develop operational indicators for a regular reporting on territorial matters.

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